THE BLIND IN CHINA

One of China's Blind

Little blind girl sold by her mother to a brothel for Twenty Cents. At seven years of age she was bought back by missionaries for Forty-five Cents. She then weighed sixteen pounds, less than half the weight of the two-year-old sighted boy who stands at her left.

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CHINA CONTINUATION COMMITTEE

Special Committee on Work for the Blind in China

Bulletin No. 1

Number of Blind in China

There are no figures available as to the number of blind in China, but on the basis of statistics given in the Indian Census we are probably within the mark in estimating the total number in China at one million. The Chinese Government does practically nothing for these. The vast majority of both men and women and boys and girls are left to swell the large army of beggars which infest every Chinese city, and to drag out a miserable and often a vicious existence.

Schools for the Blind

Some sixteen schools have been opened in different parts of China and are doing excellent work, but it is appalling to think that out of the 1,000,000 blind people in China not more than six or seven hundred have been brought under Christian instruction. This means only one in every sixteen hundred or more, surely the time has come for more aggressive work to be done for this needy class.

Formation of Union Braille System

In 1913 a conference of workers for the blind in the Mandarin-speaking provinces of China was called by the British and Foreign and the American Bible societies, to consider the question of a Union Braille system for use in the whole Mandarin-speaking area. The outcome of this conference was a system which has since been used with success in some twelve or thirteen provinces, either in schools for the blind or for individual pupils taught by missionaries or Chinese Christians. Realizing that only a very small proportion of the blind in China would ever be able to enter schools for the blind, this system was especially prepared with a view to making home teaching of the blind by untrained teachers as easy as possible. Very encouraging results have been obtained from this home teaching work. A few instances only can be given here.

Home Teaching of the Blind

In Shohchow, Shansi, a blind evangelist, Mr. Twan, was taught to read and now has five or six blind pupils, the youngest of whom is seven and the eldest forty. The missionary in charge writes: "They are all going on now in the New Testament and the Lord's blessing rests over the school. Prayers, singing, and Bible reading and exposition occupy the largest part of the day. One more pupil will come in a day or two so we are going forward in several ways. This school is indeed a Bible school and is a means of much blessing in the work. We are so glad to see Mr. Twan's faithfulness and humbleness both in his life and work."

A young man in Yiyang, Hunan, was taught to read and afterwards became a teacher in a school for blind men opened in his city. A graduate of that school is now teaching in a school for blind boys opened in Changsha.

In Pucheng, Shansi, a very bright lad of sixteen suddenly lost his sight. He mastered the Braille system and was able to read the New Testament after a fortnight's teaching.

This pupil is now at the Theological Seminary in Yüncheng. Letters from the teachers say that he is getting on very well, and is not behind any of his classmates, although blind. He is now studying English so as to be able to read the whole Bible and other literature, books in Chinese Braille being as yet very few.

At Lungchuan, Chekiang, a middle-aged man has learned to read and is a standing wonder to all who gather to hear him and they are not few. At Tongshangfu, Shantung, a woman and a lad have learned both to read and write in Braille.

From Shansi comes the following:

"Our blind pupil, Wang Chong, is twenty-three years old and is a very bright Christian. He was baptized a year ago. He is getting on very nicely with his reading, is keen to learn, and does not find it at all difficult, but has not a great deal of spare time in which to study, as he has to earn his living by pulling the bellows in a tinker's workshop. He comes to our dining room every Sunday afternoon, where one of our schoolboys teaches him under my supervision; the tinker has become so interested that he brings him along himself now, and has asked me to explain the system to him, that he might be able to help the boy at home."

The extracts given above will indicate how Christians, who are able to see, may help their afflicted brethren, and what a fruitful field of service is provided for those who are willing to undertake home teaching of blind persons.

Instances such as these might be multiplied did space permit. All of the above were taught by those who had had no previous experience or training in work for the blind. It is not even necessary for a missionary or Chinese helper to learn the Braille system before teaching it. Ten or fifteen minutes given to a careful reading of the brief introduction to the Braille primer will enable almost any one to grasp the principle of the system. This being done the teacher's main work is to give the pupil the sound of the Chinese characters which are written over each Braille sign or word; as the pupil fingers his dots he is at the same time pointing to the character which gives the sound he wants to learn.

Literature in Mandarin Braille

Primers for teaching the system, the New Testament or portions thereof, and the Psalms can be obtained from the British and Foreign Bible Society, Shanghai. There is great need that interest in the teaching of the blind should be greatly extended.

Formation of New Committee

At the instigation of the China Continuation Committee, in order to promote and extend work amongst the blind throughout China, the Mandarin Braille Literature Committee, formed in 1914, has recently been reconstituted as a "Committee for the Promotion of Work for the Blind," and a program has been outlined as follows:

(1) The Further Production of Braille Literature

Books for schools and for home reading; good books on special subjects are all urgently needed.

(2) Promotion of Home Teaching

With the Union System of Braille now in use it is possible for the sighted to teach the blind in their own homes, and it is hoped to stimulate the churches to provide volunteers from their members who will take up, and systematically carry on, this most useful form of service.

(3) Promotion of Manual Work

A careful inquiry is to be made into the manual work that is now being performed by the blind in Western institutions. Methods of teaching and the adaptation of these methods to the Chinese will also be the subject of inquiry. It is most important that the blind shall become self-supporting and independent as far as possible.

(4) Stocking Braille Requisites

At present there is no place in China where the simplest apparatus and materials can be procured, and the committee proposes to stock paper, slates, and other materials that will make it easy for those who wish to help the blind to purchase what they require.

(5) Preventive Work

A vigorous campaign will be conducted as to the cause of blindness; treatment of simple diseases of the eye; the necessity of cleanliness, etc. The literature already in existence will be revised and fresh tracts will be issued, whilst it is hoped to arrange for lantern lectures and special talks in schools and for general audiences. A most useful publicity work can be carried on in this way.

(6) Development of Normal Schools

At present there are no normal schools, but to supply workers to schools that need them and to promote the starting of new schools, teachers are required. This will give a fresh outlet for some blind pupils and will greatly assist the work of teaching.

(7) Survey Work

It is hoped to make a survey of two or three cities and districts in order to learn more nearly the number of blind and the conditions under which they live.

(8) Mandarin Braille Quarterly Letter

To get into touch with scattered blind readers. This may develop later on into a Braille magazine.

(9) Aid to Needy Institutions

Some of the institutions already in existence are most inadequately supplied with funds and material essential to the work. The buildings are poor and congested and there is urgent need for better accommodation and for more assistance to make the work effective.

As an instance of the latter it may be said that a splendid work for blind girls is being carried on under difficulties at Kwaiping, Kwangsi. The workers in charge have so many pitiful cases brought to them that they have felt unable to refuse them, with

the result that fifty girls are living in a one-story building, 24 ft. by 18 ft. This building serves all purposes, of eating, schooling, working and sleeping, save that fifteen of the girls are obliged to sleep on the floor of the chapel for want of space anywhere else. The little girl whose picture is on the cover is one inmate of this school.

The new committee is composed of the following members: Rev. G. H. Bondfield, D.D., chairman; Revs. G. A. Clayton, W. J. Embery, E. E. Strother, and J. Vale; Drs. J. Y. Lee, Fong F. Sec, and S. M. Woo; Misses S. J. Garland and G. Yang; Messrs. George Fryer and George Howell. As ex-officio members the committee also has the benefit of the advice and help of Rt. Rev. L. H. Roots, D.D. (chairman), and Dr. C. Y. Cheng and Rev. E. C. Lobenstine (secretaries), of the China Continuation Committee. It is also hoped to add, as corresponding members, the following workers for the blind in China: Miss Vasel, Changsha, Hun.; Dr. M. Niles, Canton, Tung.; Miss M. Knap, Hongkong; Miss Plum, Mukden; Rev. A. G. Waern, Shohchow, Shansi.

It is obvious that to carry out anything like the program outlined above funds will be required, and much work will have to be done, and the committee counts upon the hearty coöperation of missionaries and Chinese Christians throughout the country. To insure this it is proposed to issue, at intervals, a Bulletin, of which this is the first copy, giving information from various places of what is being attempted.

The cost of printing and distributing both the English and Chinese editions of this number of the Bulletin is being borne by a kind friend from America. The committee also has in hand sufficient money to print a Braille hymn book which is now in the printers' hands and a balance of Taels 203.91 to its credit.

Prevention of Blindness

Already a small sub-committee, consisting of Dr. Lee, Dr. Woo, Mr. Vale, and Mr. Fryer, is at work on the preparation of a pamphlet, or pamphlets, bearing upon blindness, its causes and prevention and it is hoped to disseminate such at no distant date. As soon as funds permit pictorial posters will be issued for wide distribution showing how carelessness and dirt may result in blindness. Three hundred dollars Mex. will pay for 10,000 colored posters, size 15 × 21 inches.

A New Year Letter

A New Year letter to the blind is also being prepared in Mandarin Union Braille, and a copy will be forwarded to all centers where blind readers are to be found, to whom we trust it may bear a message of cheer and hope. This will be the first issue of what we hope will be a regular quarterly letter to blind readers scattered in all parts of the Mandarin-speaking area.

The committee will appreciate prayer for divine guidance and help in seeking to carry out this beneficent work, and will value suggestions from any interested therein. Contributions for help in the work may be sent to the Honorary Treasurer, Mr. W. J. Embery, China Inland Mission, 9 Woosung Road, Shanghai.

Register of Blind Readers

With a view to the preparation of a register of all readers of Mandarin Union Braille the Honorary Secretary will be glad to have the names and addresses of all such. These may be sent to:

Mr. George Howell, 7 Hankow Road, Shanghai.

Supply of Braille Requisites

Rev. George A. Clayton, who is now en route to England for furlough, has been requested to obtain a supply of Braille requisites for the blind and it is hoped that within a few months these may be on sale in Shanghai at as low prices as possible. These may be ordered from Mr. M. Hardman, China Inland Mission, 9 Woosung Road, Shanghai.

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